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SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY AGREES TO PUSH AFGHANS TO
FIND SOLUTION TO EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY ISSUE

REF: KABUL 354

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Ambassador briefed members of the diplomatic community on the U.S. position on the questions of the date for elections and executive authority in the May-August period: elections must stay on schedule for August 20, and Afghan leaders themselves (i.e., not the internationals) must find a political solution with a legal underpinning to the problem. The United States will prescribe no specific solution to the issue, but will work to keep Karzai and the opposition focused on arriving at a consensus. The Ambassador urged the diplomatic community to speak in a unified voice to Karzai and the opposition along these two points. Other heads of missions agreed, and many welcomed the strong U.S. lead on these issues. End Summary.

Way Forward Must Be Afghan-Led

12. (SBU) On February 19, the Ambassador invited representatives of the international community (see para six for invitees) to his residence, to outline the U.S. position on the election date and the question of executive authority after May 22. The Ambassador made clear the U.S. did not support or oppose any candidate, including Karzai. The election outcome would be for Afghan voters to decide. The international interest in the election was solely to preserve the stability, security, and constitutional government of Afghanistan. The U.S. supported the decision last month by the Independent Election Commission to designate August 20 as the election date. That date would allow sufficient time for the IEC and UN to make administrative arrangements and the ANA and ISAF to provide a secure environment for the vote to take place. The firmness of our voice on August 20 was to preclude any discussion or action either to advance or delay the election date. All foreign representatives endorsed the August 20 date.

13. (SBU) On the question of executive authority in the period after May 22 and until the presidential inauguration (most likely in September-October), the Ambassador made clear this was an issue requiring an Afghan-led solution, involving President Karzai and the opposition. There are any number of solutions out there if the Afghans would be willing to find and agree to them. The only role the international community should be to continue to urge Afghans to work together to find an agreeable political solution, preferably with some form of legal underpinning. All sides would have to recognize that they will need to accept an outcome short of their respective optimal solution. The Ambassador discouraged the internationals from devising or advocating for any of a range of possible solutions. Those present agreed an Afghan-led process was crucial to any proposed solution's success.

Internationals Agree to Push Message

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador encouraged the other heads of missions to use a "tough tone of voice" when communicating this message to both the Palace and opposition groups. The international community should stay focused on the following primary interests: a solution that preserves August 20, strengthens the constitution, and avoids a crisis. Embassies should promote this message individually without joint demarches or talking points, the Ambassador advised.

¶5. (SBU) UK Ambassador Cowper-Coles agreed personal opinions on the way forward were secondary and that the international community had to be united on the August 20 election date. British Foreign Minister Miliband told Karzai this week that Karzai needed to solve the issue directly with opposition groups. Russian Ambassador Kabulov agreed with the Ambassador on both the election date and the role of the internationals, emphasizing that the diplomatic community had to stay patient at the same time it was vigilant in pressing the Afghans to reach a political consensus. Turkish Ambassador Tokdemir was inquisitive and willing to be helpful. As they were leaving, several of the representatives remarked that they welcomed the orientation of the U.S. thinking and were grateful for the strong lead from us.

¶6. (U) Guest list:

Attendees:

Italian Ambassador Glaentzer
Pakistan Ambassador Sadiq
Russian Ambassador Kabulov
Turkish Ambassador Tokdemir
UK Ambassador Cowper-Coles
Chinese CDA Li
Dutch CDA van der Waals
French CDA Fitou
German CDA Buck
Indian CDA Mishra
NATO Acting Senior Civilian Rep Riggio
Canadian Minister Knutson
UNAMA Special Assistant to SRSG Smith

Regretted:

Japanese Ambassador Sato
EU Special Representative Sequi
WOOD